



EARLY/CHILD MARRIAGE IN SYRIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

Report By: Kimberly Acosta and Lara Thomas



The MILLA
PROJECT



The MILLA Project is a non-profit, non-sectarian, human rights/social service agency dedicated to helping our Arabic and Persian speaking community. The MILLA Project's mission is to abolish all forms of gender-based violence.

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Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War, over 2 million Syrians have become refugees externally displaced primarily in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Lebanon is a host country to over 1 million Syrians, while Turkey contains over 700,000 and Jordan hosts over 600,000 refugees (The Australian, 2014). Jordan has the Za'atari camp, which has become the second largest refugee camp in the world (Stoter, 2013). This report focuses on the issue of early and/or child marriage in the Syrian refugee community, with the majority of information derived from the Syrian refugee community in Jordan. This report is meant to shed light on the issues that surround and contribute to the prevalence of early/child marriage in these refugee communities, in addition to suggestions to resolve the issue or prevent a rise in its occurrence. So far, no conclusive evidence has shown that there has been a rise in early/child marriage within the Syrian refugee community, but does show that a rise may be imminent if nothing is done to address the issues contributing to the parent(s) making the decision to do so (UN Women, 2013).

The issue of early/child marriage in Syria is a complex one. It can be generally accepted that early/child marriage was a cultural tradition and practice in Syria before the civil war and resulting refugee crisis. Therefore, it can be said that the marriages aren't a direct result of the refugee crisis and can be considered by some in the Syrian refugee community to not be a negative issue impacting them in Jordan. What can't be agreed upon within the Syrian refugee community is the age at which early/child marriage occurs (UN Women, 2013). They attribute the age of the child/teenager when they are married as being correlated to the city of origin, with women from Damascus and other urban areas insisting on early marriage being a rural tradition specific to cities like Homs and Dera'a, where girls are married around 13 or 14 (UN Women, 2013; The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012). In spite of the controversy surrounding the prevalence of early/child marriage in Syria prior to the crisis, many families, women and young brides have said or implied that their situations as refugees in host countries have contributed to why they were married so young (Damon, 2013; The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

Factors Contributing to Occurrence of Early/Child Marriage: Financial Pressure, Protection and Honor

With it being established that child/early marriages are cultural traditions within the Syrian community, it is important to realize that with Syrians becoming refugees, this tradition can become more prevalent. Economic distress/pressure, in addition to the concern of protecting a daughter's and/or family's honor has resulted in several young marriages and can result in more (Plan International, 2013). Early/child marriage has become a coping mechanism for the environment the refugees are living in (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

With regards to economic distress, many Syrian families have been dependent primarily on their family savings (UN Women, 2013). Work is hard to find, and even when it is found it can be assumed that the pay received is hardly sufficient for a family to survive on (UN Women, 2013). Many refugees are unaware of the services available to them, leaving them unable to benefit from the programs. In other situations, the difficulty in accessing the services makes it nearly impossible for refugees to benefit from them. Food vouchers are available to Syrian refugees, but some women have experienced having to wait in line for 8 to 12 hours and still having to return the following day to wait again. Other women are unable to access these services because their male relatives or husbands are out for the majority of the day, and the women are afraid of what can happen to them in their

environment because of their status as refugees in their host countries (UN Women, 2013). In addition, financial relief from agencies is dwindling because of the lack of funding for Syrian refugees.

The UN has projected that there will be 3.6 million refugees by the end of 2014. So far, funding received from donors has amounted to \$1.1 billion dollars leaving a funding gap of over \$3.7 billion dollars (Patrick Maigua, United Nations, 2014). In the Syrian refugee crisis, early/child marriage provides financial relief because it gives the family one less mouth to feed (UN Women, 2013). Sometimes, the family of the bride is paid for the marriage, which is money used towards feeding the rest of the family. For some parents, it is a way of providing their daughters with a future or preventing them from having to experience the life they are living as refugees. In essence, they view marrying their daughters as being able to provide them with economic stability in comparison to them being refugees (UN Women, 2013).

Um Sarah is a refugee and a mother of a 14 and 15 year old in Jordan, and she arranged marriages for her daughters because she couldn't support them. She said, "as a single mother, I cannot support them. I cannot feed them. I wanted to make sure they are OK, so I asked around if people know of good Syrian men they could marry" (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

Economic pressure couples with the issue of protecting a daughter's/family's honor. Protecting the honor of your daughter essentially protects the family's honor. This is another cultural tradition within Syria and the Middle Eastern/North African community, and it is taken very seriously generally. Protecting honor through marriage is common in contexts where sexual violence is common (UN Women, 2013).

In the Syrian refugee community, protecting the daughter from rape has become one of the main reasons cited for child/early marriages. Hanadi's father had his 14 year old daughter engaged to her cousin in line with tradition in Homs, Syria, but said that it has now become a necessity. He said, "If they raped a nine-year-old girl, they can do anything. I will not feel OK if I do not see her married to a decent man who can protect her" (UN Women, 2013).

This sentiment rings true for other refugees as well. Najwa was 13 years old when her mother married her, but her mother swore she only did it because of the situation, insisting she wouldn't have married her this young if they were in Syria. Eman, a 14 year old mother also said it was because of the situation (Arwa Damon, CNN, 2013). There is no evidence that early/child marriages are increasing in the Syrian community as a direct result of being displaced. What is known is that as refugees, Syrians face economic and physical insecurity within their host environments. Social traditions and customs are known to become amplified in displacement, and over time if the Syrian crisis does not become resolved, it is a possibility that early/child marriage rates will increase and even a possibility that the age will decrease (UN Women, 2013).

The Negative Consequences of Early/Child Marriage in the Syrian Refugee Communities

A negative consequence of child marriage is the inability for girls to continue and/or finish their education. Girls already face difficulties in attaining an education because of reasons such as not being able to go because of the family's fear of something happening to the young girl, in addition to needing them to work if they are not going to be married. For the most part, it is expected that a girl is going to be married and when she is finally married, she will face even greater difficulties in attaining an education because she is expected to then start a family, take care of that family and do other activities expected from a wife. Sixteen year old Manal was engaged to marry a man with her father Thabet expecting her to do so because of it being a tradition, as well as a way of providing

protection for her, in addition to taking financial pressure off of the family. She refused and her father accepted her choice with the help of staff from a UNICEF-NGO ran youth center.

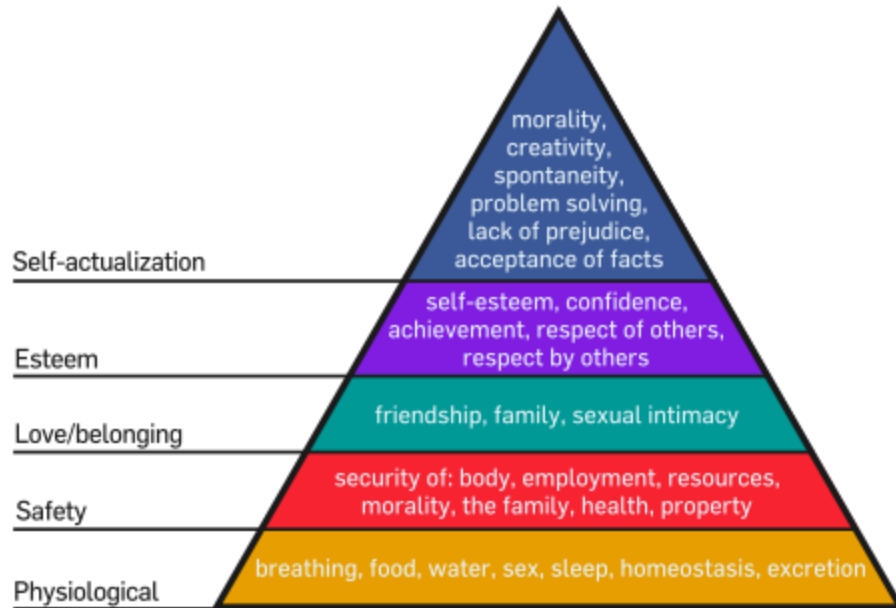
In addition, the negative effects of early/child marriage can apply to the young woman's and/or girl's health. It can affect their psychological and physical health. Older Syrian refugees who were married very early cited several negative psychosocial consequences of their early marriages. Some of those reasons include increased responsibility towards keeping their husband and children happy, having their "childhood stopped early", lacking the maturity and knowledge to cope with the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, and lacking the knowledge about relationships with their husbands and their mother-in-laws (UN Women, 2013).

Physically, there are many health risks that come with early/child marriage. Specifically, the physical health consequences are related to childbearing. Under the age of 18, women are more susceptible to birth complications since they aren't physically ready to give birth. Also, these complications can lead to the inability to have children later in life, or even death (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012); (UN Women, 2013)

Another negative consequence is one that is unique to informal marriages. The majority of child/early marriages in the Syrian community are unregistered for various reasons, limiting the woman's or girl's rights in marriage even more so than they are already limited. They can lose these rights in divorce or in disputes with their husbands leaving them more vulnerable than they already are as under-aged brides. Most of the women are unaware of the limitations of their rights resulting from informal marriages. Some women lack the documentation required to officiate the marriage in the court of law while others see it as unimportant in the greater scheme of things with the other situations they are facing as refugees. It is also a possibility that the marriages aren't registered because of the age of some of the girls being married, this of course depending on the law of the host country the refugees are residing in (Maha Abu Shama, Amnesty International, 2013); (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

Recommendations

The problems that the Syrian refugee communities face become amplified the longer they have to deal with them, and eventually become factors that can contribute to the rise in early/child marriages. To prevent this rise, the challenges the Syrian refugees face can be examined and addressed in the terms of Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" shown below (Neel Burton, 2012).



Most basically, Maslow argues that we have a number of needs that are arranged accordingly, and that some of these needs are more basic than others. The lower needs have to be met before someone can move on to satisfy his or her higher needs. Maslow called the four bottom levels of the pyramid “deficiency needs” because a person will feel anxious if they are not met but won’t feel anything if they are met (Neel Burton, 2012). In regards to the Syrian refugee community and resolving the issue of early/child marriage in each community, this report will focus on the two bottom deficiency needs.

Physiological Needs

In Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”, physiological needs include breathing, food, water, sleep, excretion and other basic needs that are considered required in order to survive. This level is the most primitive. In the Syrian refugee communities, there is significant difficulty in being able to acquire food vouchers. Women and children are the majority of the Syrian refugee population with adult males representing only about 20% of it. Male relatives are typically searching for work, leaving women as the only ones available to receive aid like food vouchers. This becomes a problem since the environments refugees reside in are considered unsafe for women, resulting in women only being able to go out usually when accompanied by a male relative. Aside from this preventing women from receiving food vouchers, when women do manage to go out to wait in line to receive food vouchers and other basic necessities, they have to wait 8-12 hours and can receive nothing having to come back the next day (UN Women, 2013). This inability to even acquire the basic necessity of food for the family indicates one of the aspects of financial pressure that can result in early/child marriage. Many parents believe in marrying their daughters in order to provide for others in the family, as well as being able to provide for her so that she is no longer in that situation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for distributing most of the aid and works with partner agencies, and once refugees register with the UNHCR-if they manage to do so-they are typically eligible to receive a card that allows them 30 dollars' worth of food each month. Since this isn't enough to survive on, refugees sometimes need to turn to smaller agencies who don't have the manpower to distribute the aid themselves forcing them to rely on middlemen to register refugees for receiving basic necessities. Through this system in particular, corruption thrives with the middlemen trying to extort refugees in order for them to be placed on lists to receive aid (Associated Press, 2014). This corruption thrives in Lebanon, where there are no formal camps for refugees. It can also apply to refugees who reside outside of the camp, since they may be unaware that aid is free.

Umm Nader who is a mother of seven was told to pay 30 dollars to speed up registration with the UNHCR which is supposed to be free. In another case, Umm Hamid, a mother of ten says that "we've been hungry for a week" because of all the things she has to pay for (Associated Press, 2014). The vulnerability of refugees places them in these situations of exploitation and places them at a point where they may begin to feel like there are no other options except for early/child marriage considering the difficulty in acquiring even the most basic necessities. As mentioned earlier in this report, Um Sarah married her two daughters ages 15 and 14 because she couldn't provide for them as a single mother and was quoted as saying "I cannot support them. I cannot feed them. I wanted to make sure they are OK..." (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

Although the UNHCR and other aid agencies are aware of the corruption, there isn't much they can do. The UNHCR has a systems of checks that is meant to prevent the corruption from being widespread and also because they reach out to refugees informing them that services are free (Associated Press, 2014). Back in 2013, the UNHCR pointed out a widening gap between the needs of the Syrian refugees and the resources available with the gap being around \$700 million dollars (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013). As of recently, the funding gap has become \$3.7 billion dollars. As the number of Syrian refugees increases by about 100,000 monthly, the funding gap for assistance increases just as significantly. With this increasing gap comes the concern that the entire region will become unstable, especially Lebanon which holds the majority of the refugees. In addition, without the financial support, violence against women and children can increase along with malnutrition rates, and waterborne and communicable diseases. This will result from reduced food rations, limited access to health care services, poor hygiene and lack of access to clean water (Patrick Maigna, United Nations, 2014). Without these fundamental needs being met, the issue of child marriage cannot be addressed since it has become a way of relieving financial pressure and providing necessities for the rest of the family.

In order to resolve these issues, funding would need to be provided first so that aid agencies had the financial abilities to help the Syrian refugees. After that, widespread awareness and outreach would need to be instated in order to reach as many refugees as possible to educate them on the programs available and also showing that these programs are free. Cooperation between the UNHCR and the smaller organizations providing aid to the Syrian refugees is necessary in order to prevent corruption. It will also allow for more people to be available to reach out to the refugees therefore allowing more refugees to be reached and helped.

Safety Needs

After physiological needs are satisfied, the individual is then allowed to focus on safety needs. Safety needs include securing employment, resources, morality, the family, property, and more (Neel Burton, 2012). Financial security ties into this level. Safety needs are intertwined with physiological

needs since physiological needs have to be met in order to secure employment and so forth. Safety needs help satisfy physiological needs also in the sense that in order to buy food or water or other basic necessities, you need to have financial security along with other types of security.

In Syria, part of the reason child marriage is occurring is for financial relief, but also because families cannot provide physiological needs for their children including the daughter they are marrying. Several refugees believed marrying their daughters to someone would provide them with a future, and with a situation better than the one they are in with their families. Some of the parents believe in addition to providing security for the rest of the family, they are providing security for their daughter. Also, with there being concerns about females being raped and kidnapped in their host countries, parents are providing security of morality and family honor, a cultural and/or social belief. They are preventing dishonor from being brought upon the family if the daughter is raped, and by marrying her to someone who is meant to protect her from these threats, they may believe they are protecting her honor also.

Safety needs are important and need to be addressed in order to prevent child marriage from rising in the Syrian refugee community. Security in general is a big reason in why early or child marriage is occurring. Aside from the physiological needs being met, Syrian refugees need to have their concerns about security addressed. Even if the UNHCR and other agencies manage to make sure that the majority or all Syrian refugees are able to satisfy the basic needs of food, water, a place to sleep and etc., there is still a need to assure Syrian refugees a secure future for themselves and their families that does not require early/child marriage.

Employment for Syrian refugees is hard to find with males searching all day. On the other hand, women are left with only two options, either remain at home all day afraid to go out because of fear for their own safety or risk their safety by trying to find financial or any relief anywhere. One woman named Farah was thirsty for an entire day while her husband was working because she was afraid that the men who provide water would harass her (Maha Abu Shama, Amnesty International, 2013). On the other end of the spectrum, Mariam and her 10 year old daughter were at a hospital that provided free care for refugees and overheard a man mention free housing for refugees. Desperate for relief, she and other women were loaded into three cars and were taken to a place that may have been a brothel. She managed to escape with her daughter and others, but this situation shows the risk that women face when security isn't provided.

Therefore, security as a whole needs to be addressed in Syrian refugee communities. It is not an easy feat, but women need to feel safe in their environment, and families need to feel that women and girls are safe. This will address the concern of marrying girls off younger than usual because of the fear for their physical safety. With the environment becoming safer for vulnerable refugees, financial security can then be addressed so that single mothers and families don't feel the need to marry girls off younger in order to provide the girls with a financially secure future in addition to providing the family with financial relief. Until then, The MILLA Project suggests creating women co-ops that allow women to work from home, or a place that can be considered entirely safe for them. This allows women to contribute to the family financially, which provides the women with some degree of freedom and the family as a whole with some financial security. After security as a whole is addressed and financial security is reached, parents like Hanadi's father will stop seeing the tradition of early and/or child marriage as becoming a necessity (The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2012).

Outreach and awareness efforts to educate families on the negative health consequences of early/child marriage can be received more readily since Syrian refugee communities will have their physiological and safety needs resolved. With those needs no longer being a primary concern and early/child marriage no longer being a necessity, awareness and outreach on the benefits of allowing girls to receive education will be also more readily received. Therefore, there can be more girls like

Manal, who will be allowed to continue their education in spite of their fathers' concerns for financial relief and their future (Melanie Sharpe, 2013).

Recommendations to Begin Relieving Financial Pressure in the Syrian Refugee Communities: Co-ops and Safe Centers

In order to provide financial relief for Syrian women refugees and their families, The MILLA Project recommends creating women co-ops. The co-op guide is based on a USDA Office of Rural Development publication, meaning the suggestions in this report would need to be adapted to the laws and regulations of the host country. Also, we recommend that more centers are opened like the UN Women affiliated Women and Girls Oasis that is located in Jordan. These recommendations are meant to provide women with safe places to do work that will allow them to help contribute to their families financially. This in turn will assist with preventing child/early marriage, perhaps allowing the girls to work with their female relatives in these co-ops.

Co-ops

A cooperative is a business where the owners control, finance, and operate the business for mutual benefit. The benefit of forming a cooperative is that it provides greater benefits to the members in varying ways such as increasing individual income or securing a needed service not otherwise attainable (United States Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development , 1996). The MILLA Project recommends a women's co-op for Syrian refugees because it would allow women to work together using the skills that are already available to them. It would primarily be a safer option for providing financial support for their families because it would involve only women. It would be owned by women and operated by women, therefore providing them with an environment where they will feel safe and unexploited, have the ability to bond with other women, and also provide themselves with the confidence in knowing that they can independently produce income for themselves and their families.

The three defining characteristics of cooperatives are that they are:

1. User-owned
2. User-controlled
3. User-benefitted

What is meant by user-owned is that those who own and finance the co-op are the same people who use it through buying supplies, using its services, etc. The co-op can be financed in different ways by the owners. User-controlled means those who use the co-op control it also by electing the board of directors and voting on issues. The user-benefitted principle means the cooperative's main purpose is to benefit the members for whatever reason or in whichever way it was meant to benefit the members. The earnings are distributed according to each member's business volume in the cooperative. The cooperative will also benefit Syrian refugees because in order for it to function well, there needs to be continuing member education which involves gaining new members because membership usually changes. Starting a cooperative isn't easy, and it is complex, but it begins with a small group of possible members finding out a common need and then finding a way to fulfill that need.

Sequence of Events in Developing a Co-op According to USDA Report:

1. Set up a meeting with potential members to discuss issues and decide the economic need a cooperative might be able to fill.
2. Conduct an exploratory meeting with the possible member-users and if the group votes to continue, select a steering committee.
3. Survey prospective members to decide the potential use of the cooperative.
4. At a second meeting, discuss the survey results and vote on whether or not to proceed.
5. Conduct a needs or use cost analysis.
6. Discuss the results of the use cost analysis at a third meeting and vote by secret ballot on whether or not to continue.
7. Conduct a feasibility analysis and create a business plan.
8. Present the results of the feasibility analysis at the fourth meeting and if everyone agrees to proceed, decide whether or not to keep the steering committee members.
9. Prepare legal papers and incorporate them into the business.
10. Organize a meeting that includes the charter members and all potential members in order to review and adopt the proposed bylaws. Also elect the board of directors.
11. Organize the first meeting of the board and elect officers. Now assign responsibilities to implement the business plan.
12. Conduct a membership drive.
13. Acquire capital and develop a loan application package.
14. Hire the manager of the cooperative
15. Acquire the facilities.
16. Begin operations.

In the co-op, the leadership group is responsible for starting the cooperative, as well as seeing it through. When seeing the project through, it is necessary to have people experienced with forming a co-op to help guide the leadership group through the process. This person or group helping should know all the financial, legal and economic aspects that come with forming a co-op. In general, the rules for the success of the co-op includes using advisers and committees effectively as well as keeping all members informed and involved because it increases feelings of ownership and responsibility for the success of the co-op. In addition, there needs to be a good manager-board of directors relationship. The directors represent the members and are legally responsible for the performance and conduct of the co-op. The directors need to keep in sight the long-term decisions for the co-op while management takes care of the short-term decisions. The management implements the ideas created by the board of directors. It is important to conduct businesslike meetings, follow sound business practices and forge links with other cooperatives if possible (United States Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development , 1996).

With Syrian refugees, the co-op will begin primarily with pooling together resources that each woman has so that together, they can create something that benefits all of them more as a whole rather than each woman working by herself. Each group of women will have something different to offer such as jewelry making skills, or food produce, so the guidelines to forming a co-op are relative to the resources available. For example, some Syrian refugee women residing in Jordan outside of the Za'atari refugee camp reported that although they didn't have official jobs, they did generate income for their families through making crafts or food items for sale to neighbors or by selling fruits or vegetables in the streets (UN Women, 2013). These are all great examples of resources that can be pooled together in order to start a co-op whether it is food based, or crafts based. Although these two following examples are in different countries, they are both examples of co-ops that have operated in the Middle East in situations similar to what the Syrian refugee women face in regards to the restrictions on what women can do, the traditions and social customs of society, as well as financial instability.

In the Luxor governorate in Upper Egypt, poverty rates are much higher than in Lower Egypt. Cultural, social and religious norms prevent women from working outside of the home and they also face discrimination in regards to wages and work conditions. In 2013 in the village of Al Tod, 26 local women left a male dominated agricultural association and created their own cooperative where they raised cattle and were able to secure decent working conditions and income for themselves. They are shareholders, and make the decisions within the co-op on division of labor and buying livestock. They now earn 300 to 400 Egyptian pounds a month whereas they weren't paid before for their work. This cooperative was started with two others as the result of a MDG-funded joint program between 4 United Nations Agencies, the Egyptian government, and The Misr El Kheir Foundation. All together, these organizations and agencies provided women with income-generating assets, in this case the cattle, business development training and technical support, all factors mentioned in what makes a cooperative successful (UN Women, 2013).

On the other hand, in 2012 in Palestine, KhitamSameeh was placed in an early arranged marriage at age 15 that gave her five children, and faced economic struggle daily. She was able at age 42 to come out of a women's cooperative program with a new set of skills and a source of income. In Palestine, women face traditional customs that restrict them from working for money. The UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality worked with the NGO the Bisan Centre for Research and Development and its partner organizations to establish cooperatives for women to meet, train and work with approval from the community and their families. The partnership helped support six cooperatives and set up two in the West Bank between 2010 and 2011 and continued doing so at the time of the publication. The cooperatives varied in functions from beekeeping to processing food. The cooperatives helped the women as a group, and individuals providing them with a newfound sense of confidence and their potential as community members. KhitamSameeh ended up as the head of the Baita cooperative, where women earn more than \$380 dollars annually. With support from the UN and its partnership with the Bisan Centre for Research and Development, the Baita cooperative was able to have its own shop where it sold the goods and products of the group (UN Women, 2012).

In summary, women co-ops will provide a place where Syrian refugee women can earn a decent income for their families, under working conditions that they decide upon. In addition, they will be able to gain support from one another through their shared experiences as refugees and through the resources that each woman is able to bring to the cooperative. The cooperative with support from advisors, like UN Women or NGOs, will allow women to have newfound confidence and potential in their skills as workers and financial supporters of their families. In regards to early/child marriage, women cooperatives will provide young women and girls with a place to work without the fear of harassment or exploitation. Also, it will help to relieve the financial pressure families are facing as refugees in host countries where there isn't much work available. With women working, they will be able to support their daughters to continue their education and postpone marriage. With some financial security being established through women cooperatives, organizations and agencies can begin to address early/child marriage as a cultural tradition that can be changed with awareness and education and it will no longer feel like a necessity for Syrian refugees.

The Women and Girls Oasis in Jordan

In the fall of 2012, UN Women began a multi-sectorial protection and support pilot project known as the Women and Girls Oasis in the Za'atari Refugee Camp in Jordan. The overall goal of the project was meant to empower vulnerable Syrian women refugees through self-reliant opportunities and engagement in community life that would create the foundation for preparing for the "day after" Syria. The project evolved to create and maintain access to self-reliant opportunities through cash for work programs, continuing to involve women in the camp community through preparing them for

decision making processes in the camp, and providing women with awareness and education on women rights, including addressing gender based violence and also training in life skills and social cohesion (UN Women, 2014); (UN Women, 2014).

Fatima and Hajar are two women who are involved in the program, working in the Tailoring workshop. The Tailoring workshop sews newborn outfits for the babies delivered to the hospitals in the refugee camp. This is one of the cash for work opportunities the center offers, another option being hairdressing. The center operates as a safe haven for women and girls, offering activities such as drawing, mosaics, English classes, jewelry making, sewing and even gymnastics. The women are also able to bond with each other over the violence they have experienced and witnessed, some even opening up about it with one another and the staff. The programming at the center was developed from consultation with the Syrian women and they also help run the program (UN Women, 2013); (UN Women, 2014). This allows the center to function not only as a means of financial gain, but a place where women can bond with one another and experience some relief in sharing their stories. Also, the activities provided may serve as a stress relief for the women and girls. Women have described the center as a “source of hope”, and ask for similar centers to be opened including upgrading the current center to allow for a greater capacity. They want more women to benefit from the program because it provides them with the opportunity to regain their confidence and dignity and also allows them to be productive and provide for their families (UN Women, 2014).

In Conclusion

In summary, early/child marriage is a cultural tradition and a security need. While there hasn't been any conclusive evidence of the rates of early/child marriage rising, the factors that result from displacement and can lead to the decision for parents to marry their daughters early in life are highly prevalent and present in Syrian refugee communities. The financial pressure families face, in addition to their desire to protect their daughters from rape, kidnapping, or other forms of harassment and exploitation, and providing a future for their daughters, are all factors that can result in a rise in early/child marriage within these refugee communities. Generally, the lack of financial and personal security, in addition to not seeing any better option further result in the occurrence of early/child marriages.

Through cooperatives and centers like the Women and Girls Oasis, women who are the majority of the Syrian refugee community will be provided with a safe place where they can earn a living for themselves and their families. Cooperatives allow women to pool together their individual resources in a way that produces a better outcome when everyone is working together. Through doing this, women will also recognize their potential as workers and financial supporters of their families. This in turn will result in financial security and some level of environmental security, so that mothers and fathers won't feel that early/child marriage has become a necessity. It will allow for families to wait before marrying their daughters.

If funding allows for more centers that promote skills, job opportunities, security and support, to be established, women will have more opportunities to financially support their families. It will also serve as a place where women can group together to help one another get through the challenges they face as refugees in their host communities. In addition, younger women and girls will be provided with a place where they can gain skills that can prepare them for working in the future.

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